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ABSTRACT

This article reports on five of the most important issues confronting community college presidents in the 1970's. (1) Finance and Control: the centralization caused by state and federal financing and control conflicts with the colleges' current commitment to serving local needs; furthermore, decreasing public enthusiasm for higher education as a priority has led to a financial crisis. (2) Faculty Unionism: although collective bargaining has sometimes led to increased local funding, it has also caused the disappearance of collegiality, the inability to foster an open administration, the stifling of innovation, and a decreased sensitivity to the needs of students and the community. (3) Trends in Administration Management: the community college president's role has shifted from that of an educational planner and leader to that of a manager and mediator. (4) Missions, Goals, and Functions: community colleges have recently adopted many noneducational roles under the aegis of community services; presidents and boards are questioning the propriety, and even the legality, of diverting educational tax dollars to other social purposes, no matter how laudable those purposes may be. (5) Career Education: students continue to choose transfer programs even though they will find no jobs; community colleges must encourage a new image for occupational programs. (DC)

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What are Community College Presidents Thinking About?

by Norman C. Harris, Professor,
Center for the Study of Higher Education, School of Education

Fifty-four community college presidents signed in at the Center of Higher Education's Summer Seminar held at Traverse City, Michigan, last June. They came from all over the United States—from Arizona to Massachusetts and from Minnesota to Arkansas. During a week of working sessions with three half-days of "fun time" to enjoy the Grand Traverse Bay region, the seminar members came to grips with seven problems of their own choosing, problems which they had pre-identified as "Major Issues of the 70s":

- Can Adversarial Relationships be Humanized?
- An Eleventh-Hour Look at 1202
- New Patterns of Administrative Management
- What Happened to Excellence and Integrity?
- The Future of Voluntary, Regional Accreditation
- Career Education and the National Manpower Mix
- State Coordination—Promise or Peril?
- Where's The Money Coming From?

During the summers of 1973 and 1974, this writer travelled west and south to more than 30 states, conferring with two-year college presidents and faculty, with students and governing board members, and with state coordinating board officials.

Everywhere there was discussion of issues facing postsecondary education and, specifically, the public community college. Out of these consultations there emerged a second list of "major issues," which overlaps the list from the Summer Seminar to a remarkable degree:

Issues Identified in 30-State Tour of Community Colleges—1973-74

The community college and lifelong learning

Problems of finance

Impact of faculty unionism

Trends in administrative management

The threat of state and federal control

Clarification of mission and goals

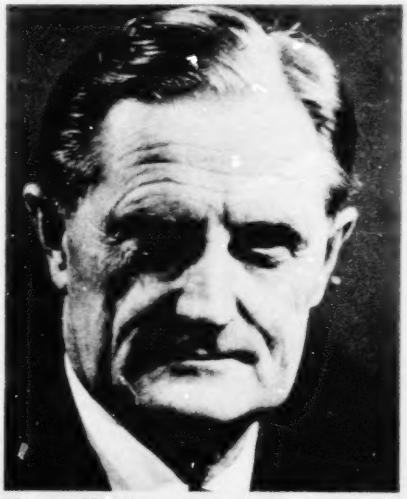
Career education—what fields?—what levels?

How can excellence and standards be maintained?

Since a full-length monograph would be required in order to examine all of these "front-burner" issues in detail, only five will be looked at here. The five are selected from both of the above lists and, in some cases, represent a combination of closely related issues. The concerns and dilemmas presented are illustrative of the problems community college presidents are thinking about from coast to coast.

FINANCE AND CONTROL

Traditionally, community (junior) colleges were governed by locally elected boards of trustees. Budgets were usually met by locally levied taxes on real property, although state appropriations and student tuition also entered into the financing formula in many states. All of the so-called "pacesetter states"[1] (California, Washington, Texas, Michigan, New York, Florida, and Illinois) except Florida saw their community college systems grow and prosper under the direction of local boards and with major inputs of local funding.



Norman Harris

Recently however, the trend has been toward an increased share of state financing and control and, since 1972, toward some measure of federal financing and control. The fact that state and federal dollars seem to have far more leverage than local dollars is affecting community

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college operations in nearly every state, and many presidents feel that centralization of control is having adverse effects on community college operations. At the very time when response to community needs has become the *modus vivendi* of two-year colleges, the constraints being placed on them by centralized state and federal control agencies threaten to vitiate the very idea of the *community college*. The federally required "1202 Commissions" are as yet relatively unknown cogs in the future control machinery, but presidents and local boards sense that when these Commissions become fully activated, the local board may become only an "idler gear" in the governance mechanism.

Community college presidents and boards are extremely concerned about the financial future of their colleges. With FTE student costs now at an estimated national average of nearly $1800 per year and with escalating salary demands on the one hand and taxpayer revolts on the other, community colleges are in a real financial crisis.[2] Higher education does not command the support from the general public that it once did; conflicting social priorities such as welfare, health, environmental improvement, and crime control have ready access to the public purse, with welfare threatening to displace education in many states as the top social priority. Although community colleges have retained a somewhat better image with state legislators than have other institutions of higher learning, this is small comfort, since there are signs in many states that the litmus paper of public opinion is turning and that legislators and taxpayers are beginning to question whether or not the community college is not another social cost rather than a sound capital investment. Presidents and board members are asking themselves, Why this attitudinal change? What can be done about it this year and in the years ahead? How can cost-effectiveness be improved? How can public confidence be restored?

FACULTY UNIONISM

For some years now, community college faculty groups have been organizing for collective bargaining. In a number of states (New York and Michigan, for example) where collective bargaining has legislative mandate, faculty unionism is strong and most two-year colleges have collective bargaining agreements. In many other states, however, faculty unionism is a future-oriented issue rather than a current one.

Presidents and board members are divided in their opinions about faculty unionism. Contrary to what might be expected, not all presidents are opposed to collective bargaining. Indeed, some regard collective bargaining as having been beneficial, particularly in "forcing" increased financial support out of a reluctant board or a "tight-fisted" community.

However, the rules of a zero-sum game always come into play. To offset whatever financial gains have accrued from faculty union organization, presidents cite the losses which inevitably accompany the adversarial process. The disappearance of collegiality, the inability to foster an open administration, the stifling of innovation, and a decreased sensitivity to the needs of students and community are mentioned as examples of the negative trade-offs which accompany the financial gains unionism often brings. One president expressed his concern in the following words: "We seem destined . . . to move toward relations of an adversary type, characterized by confrontation and bargaining backed by force, threat, and intimidation."

"How can adversarial relationships be humanized?" presidents ask. "How can the mistrust, conflict, tension, and wheel spinning which accompany the annual negotiations be minimized? When everything is negotiable, what can be shared? How can public trust be restored when dissension and strife rule the campus?" These and other questions are high on the list of concerns of community college presidents everywhere.

TRENDS IN ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

One community college president of long experience and national reputation expressed this opinion at the Summer Seminar:

> I've seen college administration change in the last twenty years from a pattern in which the Board set policy, the president was the educational leader, the faculty taught, and the students studied; to a pattern in which the Statehouse and the Feds make policy, the Board and the faculty draw up legal contracts for operation, students "generate credit hours," and I try to keep the buildings warm and clean and get the payroll out on time.

Facetious? Yes, but the laughter from other presidents was brittle and tenuous, not good humored. Presidents generally admit that their role as educational leaders and planners is fading and that pressures and constraints from within and without the college inevitably push them toward roles as managers and mediators rather than as professional educational leaders.

As emphasis has shifted to administrative management, new "tools of management" have appeared and each has had its true believers; each has duly run its cycle. The 1950s ushered in the era of human relations in management; the early 1960s brought on a cycle of participative management; the mid-1960s saw the ascendance of social-psychological theories of management. Everyone knows that the management watchword today is "Management by Objectives" (MBO)—everyone, that is, except those who have already found that MBO (even when buttressed by a Management Information System—MIS), is, like all other "neat" systems of management, no panacea; that it, like the other systems before it, reflects all the weaknesses and limitations of the manager and the managed.

Added to the management equation have been such externally imposed factors as accreditation standards, with their *Status Studies* and *Self Studies*, and demands for "accountability" from state and federal bureaus, accompanied by the imposition of planned program budgeting systems (PPBS). Very recently, the "performance objectives" variable has been added, along with demands of governmental agencies for affirmative action plans, equality of the sexes, and now the 18-year-old

majority laws and access-to-student-records legislation.

Aggregated, these demands and pressures have put a heavy strain on management, and it is little wonder that community college presidents seldom find time to concern themselves seriously with learning and teaching and with excellence and quality in the educational program.

Beset by the mounting challenges to effective administration and by now fairly well convinced that there is no magic management system, presidents are, this year as never before, subjecting organizational and administrative patterns to critical examination. The *pyramidal pattern*—faculty reporting to department/division chairmen, who report to deans, who report to the president—is being questioned by many presidents. Various combinations of administrative responsibilities are being tried, partly to achieve better economies of scale but principally to realign assignments so that learning and teaching will become of paramount importance in the management model. Instruction and student personnel services are being combined in some colleges, occupational education and community services in others; and there appears to be a return to doing some teaching on the part of administrators. Many presidents, for example, report that they are now teaching a course once or twice a year and that this makes them feel a part of the college again. Has "management" perhaps come full circle so that presidents once more feel they can give better direction to the enterprise if they are actually a part of it?

MISSION, GOALS, AND FUNCTIONS

For sixty years the two-year college in America has been expanding its services and continually defining and redefining its roles in a democratic society. One challenge or "need" after another was recognized and accepted until the full panoply of roles cited by all the "experts" comprised the accepted mission of the community college by the late 1960s. The familiar litany— college-parallel programs, occupational programs, general education, counseling and guidance, developmental/remedial education, continuing education, and community services education—constituted the recognized functions of the public two-year college until a few years ago. Boards of trustees, presidents, state coordinating boards, students, and citizens were generally glad to support, operate, and strive to improve an open-door postsecondary institution with a mission which claimed both excellence and diversity.

But recent developments have alarmed many presidents. Role expansion has suddenly become role explosion. Mission flexible may have become "Mission Impossible."

Here are some of the questions and comments of presidents as they think about the new roles being suggested for community colleges of the 1970s:[3]

"How can we operate realistic college-parallel programs with open access to courses, noncompetitive learning, and nonpunitive grading?"

"If we expand our student services program to include health care, personal counseling, insurance, and a free lunch program, who will pay for these services? And, more important, are such services a function of an educational institution?"

"If we take courses and services all over the district for small groups at remote locations, how can we keep the quality up and the cost within our budget?"

"Should we get into senior citizens' programs and lifelong learning? Who should pay for hobby/recreation programs—taxpayers generally or the students themselves?"

"Should our college operate a drug clinic? Counseling services in a prison? Day-care centers for preschool children? Are we an educational institution or a social service agency?"

"Maybe we've oversold the whole thing. Let's face it—community colleges can't solve all the nation's ills. Let's get back to education—that's our mandate!"

Where budgets still have some elasticity, community colleges are engaging in a wide variety of noneducational roles under the heading of community services, but presidents and boards are more and more frequently questioning the propriety, and even the legality, of diverting educational tax dollars to other social purposes, no matter how laudable those purposes may be.

CAREER EDUCATION

Two trend lines have been worrying college presidents and educational economists for the last four or five years. One shows that professional and managerial jobs—jobs generally considered to require a college degree—have increased very slowly, from 6 percent to only 20 percent of the labor force over the last seventy years. Even in our sophisticated, capital-intensive economy only one job out of five, in 1970, required a college degree.[4]

Another trend line shows the rate of college attendance for the same period (1900 to 1970) paralleling the professional job trend line until about 1945, at which time it began climbing steeply, until in 1969 nearly 60 percent of high school graduates entered a college of some kind.[5] Educational philosophers will maintain that there are other and more important reasons for going to college than the hope of upward occupational mobility, but philosophers or no, most young people decide on college for precisely that reason—they want to "work with people rather than with things"; they expect high incomes; and they don't want to do "the dirty work."[6] This expectation gap began to take on the dimensions of a yawning chasm in the lives of thousands of unemployed and underemployed young people by 1974, and the figure may grow to millions during the decade.

With excellent facilities, well-trained teachers, and quality programs, community colleges have been at the forefront of the career education movement for years. In most fields (business, industry, allied health, and public services) and in most localities, paraprofessional and technician jobs are available, even in the present depressed economy, for

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persons with the required postsecondary occupational training. Middle manpower jobs for associate degree graduates have held up relatively well compared to professional jobs for baccalaureate degree graduates.

Despite these job-market forces, so far there have been only minor enrollment shifts from college-parallel and general-education programs into occupational programs. To be sure, a few community college presidents report that one-half or more of their enrollment is in career-related fields, but nationwide the "two-thirds transfer one-third vocational" ratio of twenty years ago is still in effect. Unsatisfactory as that ratio was in 1954, when only the academically able high school graduates went on to college (even the junior colleges then had admissions requirements), it is most unrealistic today when 60 percent of high school graduates enter college, and community colleges are "open door."

Presidents are gravely concerned about the career futures of the thousands of community college students who show little sustained interest or demonstrated ability in academic studies but who also avoid occupational programs as if they were a plague.

. . . it is in technical fields that occupational opportunities will probably be greatest into the 1980s.

Costs of occupational programs are high—ranging from $1400 per FTE student per year for business management to $3,000 or more per year for some of the allied health technologies. Low enrollments are often the major contributing cause of high unit costs, particularly in the industry/engineering/science-related technologies. And yet, from a rate-of-return-on-investment point of view, as presidents point out, these high-cost career programs are more defensible than the lower-cost college-parallel and general-education programs which may provide little economic return for the foreseeable future to either the individual or society.[7] And, considering the crises facing the nation—energy-resources development, expansion of food production, and environment/natural resources conservation—it is in technical fields that occupational opportunities will probably be greatest into the 1980s. Community colleges are ready and will welcome the swing to career education programs when it comes. In the meantime, presidents are making sure that career education information is given wide dissemination, that counselors are prepared for career advisement, that lay advisory committees are appointed and functioning, and that present programs are competency based and of high quality.

These are some of the issues community college presidents are thinking about. There are many others—some of which at a given time and place might be more pressing than those discussed—but on any list for the 1970s these five stand near the top. There are no ready answers to such problems either from the field or from university higher-education centers. Here at the University of Michigan Center for the Study of Higher Education, School of Education, in our ongoing program of seminars and conferences, through our administrative intern program, and by means of the intensive research of our doctoral candidates in community college administration, we are continually taking a new look at these and other issues, and occasionally we generate a little new knowledge. □

[1]Leland M. Medsker and Dale Tillery, *Breaking the Access Barriers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971), p. 25.

[2]See *The Financial Crisis in the Community College* by John Lombardi, Topical Paper No. 29, ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, UCLA, 1972.

[3]The "new mission" for community colleges is portrayed in two recent publications by Edmund J. Gleazer: *A Forecast Study of Community Colleges* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973); and "After The Boom—What Now for The Community Colleges?" *Community and Junior College Journal* (Dec.-Jan., 1973).

[4]Russell Flanders, "Employment Patterns for the Seventies," *Compact*, August, 1970.

[5]Richard B. Freeman, *Overinvestment in College Training?* Discussion Paper No. 37, Harvard Institute of Economic Research (Cambridge: Harvard University, July 1974).

[6]Edmund Faltermeyer, "Who Will Do the Dirty Work Tomorrow?" *Fortune*, Jan. 1974, p. 132.

[7]For a sobering analysis of the theory of "investment in human capital as a route for economic growth," see Freeman, *Overinvestment in College Training?*, pp. 18-19.

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The School of Education's Special Education Program annually cosponsors two summer field experiences with Hawthorn Center and York Woods Center for qualified graduate students interested in teaching emotionally disturbed children during July and August. There are a limited number of traineeships available for persons having teaching certification, successful teaching experience in a regular classroom, or preparing for approval in the area of emotionally impaired. Interns receive a stipend and eight graduate credit hours for full teaching participation in one of the Center's educational programs and accompanying seminars. Inquiries may be directed to Ms. Kitchell, administrative assistant in Special Education, 2014 School of Education, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; telephone (313) 763-2374. May 15 is the application deadline.

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